Combined Chapter Reflections

**UbD 6,7 MI 5,6**

These chapters emphasized altering curriculum to reach a broad range of students. Every student is different and has different learning styles and intelligences and it is important that we keep all of these students in mind when we are creating our units. One of the concepts that was brought up, and that was reflected throughout both readings, is that of universal design. Universal design is the idea that everything should be built or created with everyone in mind. In architecture, this means planning for people with physical disabilities. In the classroom, it means planning your curriculums around people with different learning styles and intelligences, as well as those with disabilities and ELL students. The UbD/DI chapters also stress that all students should have access to high-quality and meaningful curriculum. Students need to be able to find meaning in the content. Teachers cannot simply rattle off facts and expect the students to learn and retain knowledge. They need to provide examples, let the students learn through experience, with hands-on activities. Of course, it isn’t plausible to be able to reach every student at once, and it’s not expected that teachers try and do this. Instead, teachers should spread different types of lessons throughout. Chapters 5 and 6 of MI listed suggestions for integrating multiple intelligences into the classroom in subtle ways that can be utilized in every content.

Aside from adhering to every learning styles, there was also emphasis on the ways that students learn the material. Where most teachers think they are under obligation to finish course assigned books, they think they must go over every topic as quickly as possible, only ever really skimming the surface of each concept. This often not only leaves the students behind, but it results in a huge lack of understanding for the content. Instead, teachers need to focus on deeply exploring the content, letting student explore it and find understanding in their own ways. As was mentioned several times, content should be uncovered instead of simply covered.

**MI 7, 9, 13, 14**

These chapters focused on different ways to apply MI, from individual classroom scale to entire school scale. There was also a short chapter on existential intelligence and how to integrate that subtly into different courses.

So I think a lot of the idea that the book suggests for appealing to all sorts of learners are cool, but a lot of them feel like they’re not really things that I would be able to do. For instance, having activity centers doesn’t feel like a plausible idea for me as a secondary level teacher. Sure, this is definitely something that I could see working in an elementary school, where the kids stay primarily with one teacher each day, but in a middle or high school, it doesn’t seem plausible. Another thing concerning activity centers is spacial limitations. Most classrooms do not have room enough to accommodate each of the suggested activity centers. If the way I’m picturing it is correct, then they hardly have room for even one of these. To have classrooms designed in this way isn’t something that can just be adapted. These clssrooms need to be planned out with this in mind.

Another thing that I found interesting was the idea of an MI school, and having these become more commonplace. I love the idea of them, but from a real world perspective, the unfortunate reality is that there are not enough people out there that care enough about education to acquire the funding necessary to make these schools the norm in this day in age. Maybe in 30 or so years, once MI becomes more commonly practiced in the class. While these application ideas are something to look forward to in the far future, they are unhelpful to me as a current day teacher. These are likely not things I will be able to do in my classroom. And I realize that this is an extremely negative outlook, but it is also an extremely unfortunate reality that I have to recognize.

The chapters on other ways to apply MI and integrating existential intelligence were far more helpful. They give suggestions on ways to use MI with computers, to recognize the talents and values of other intelligences in other cultures, and give insight into potential career paths for students of different intelligences. The existential chapter discusses how this potential third intelligence is likely not one that can be addressed like the other intelligences, as it can result in a huge amount of controversy (because it would seem as though teachers were trying to bring religion into schools, a violation of church and state). But it does give insight into ways that it can be subtly hinted at, because so much of history is influenced by religion, that integrating it into classes is not a hard task.

**UbD 8, MI 8, 11, 12**

Chapter 12 looks at the different ways MI can be applied to higher order thinking, such as problem solving and memory. It also suggests using “christopherian encounters’ basically suggesting that students counter information they might have known with other things, such as the generally accepted rules of music and painting, or the interpretations of different character motivations.

Chapter 8 of UbD focused on grading and its flaws, and ways to fix it. For so many students, grading is simply a goal to be reached, but not a worthwhile one. The grading system favors certain people, and lets down others who are not as strong academically and it forms a divide. Many teachers say they’re seeking a bell curve, but this is not where students should be. The bell curve stresses that most people should be in a B-C range, that this is the average, yet we as a society preach that As and Bs are where students need to be. Many colleges look more for students in the A-B range, even though B-C is considered average. We need to move away from this idea and stress grading based on proficiency, not a letter grade or number scale. Proficiency based grading puts the learner first, assessing them on their content knowledge and how they reached understanding, not on how well they test or complete assignments, and it’s something that educators as a whole must work towards.

MI chapter 8 discussed various ways to implement multiple intelligences into the classroom, but many of the ideas seemed more geared towards younger children opposed to middle and high school students. They do provide a good basis for ways to use MI in the classroom, but none of them feel like things I would be able to use and have my students take me seriously.

MI chapter 11 focused on using multiple intelligences to reach students with a variety of disabilities. Often times, these students will have a disability that impairs one of their intelligences, but they exceed in other areas. As a society, we have a terrible and gross misconception that people with disabilities will have a harder time understanding things, but we refuse to look at the way we might be teaching them. This chapter encourages educators to self-assess how they’re teaching these students, and if they’re only focusing on the area where a student is struggling and refusing to look at other possible ways to reach the students.

Chapter 12 of MI looks at using multiple intelligences to encourage higher order thinking. It looks at ways to use multiple intelligences to improve memorization and problem solving. So much of the current education system places a high value on verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences that the other intelligences often get left behind. But a great portion of students don’t learn best this way, and are not succeeding as they should be able to because they’re not being taught in this way, or are not encouraged to think this way. It’s imperative that we as teachers reach all intelligences by encouraging different thinking and ways of learning and understanding material.

**FIAE 7-10**

These chapters focused entirely on grading and grading policies. I agreed with a lot of what these chapters said, especially concerning the mastery of material and how that does not always seem like a priority in the way many teachers have been grading. I think it is important that projects and tests be weighted more heavily than homework, because these are the outlets that show that students understand the content. Often times, homework is simply busy work, designed to promote memorization that does nothing for content mastery. It is easy enough for students to fill in answers from the text, or answer questions that are simple in nature and do not require any higher level thought processes. If anything, homework should be seeing if students are understanding the content that was taught to them, and can be a useful tool in this manner, but it should not be graded.

There was also mention of proficiency based grading, which is something that is starting to come into popularity, and I personally hope the trend continues. Proficiency based grading relies on student mastery in order for students to pass classes. It does not focus on memorizing facts and 100 point scaling, but instead grades on a simpler scale of the student’s level of understanding. These are often things used currently in charter schools and private schools, and rely heavily on project based learning. Through projects, students are easier able to dig into the material, uncover knowledge of the content, and then display what they know in a creative way. If something does not come across clearly, they may be given the chance to explain their projects, thus proving their understanding (or lackthereof) through verbal means. This helps eliminate testing, which does not prove anything about a student’s true and full understanding of the content.

There was also discussion about differentiation in terms of grading. This included things such as not grading things that are unrelated to content mastery. Behavior, attendance, and effort are not things that need to be incorporated into final grades, as they show nothing about what the students has or has not learned. Participation is a good way to gain an understanding of some students’ knowledge, especially those who may not be able to routinely complete their homework but still understand the material. But participation can also be daunting and something that can bring a final grade down on students who prefer not to talk in class and are better suited to showing their understanding through projects.

**FIAE Chapters 11-14**

These chapters focused on grading scales and differentiation in gradebooks. There is a huge problem in the way many teachers are recording their grades, that results in the grades not being accurate to student mastery or progress. A big focus in chapter 11 is the concept of replacing zeros with 60s. Zeros are such a devastating grade when used on a 100 point scale, that when an A student doesn’t do a single assignment, the zero will being their entire final grade down almost two letter grades. This is not an accurate representation of their level of mastery, whereas changing the zero to a 60 would be a much more accurate representation. This is not cheating, as some people would suggest, because a 60 is still a failing grade. If a student routinely does not do their work, they will still receive and F. But substituting zeros for 60s results in a far less devastating grade drop to those students that do their work.

That being said, these chapters also discussed how the 100 point scale is inherently flawed. The current 100 point scale that is being used in most places gives A-D only 10 points per letter grade, and 60 points for an F. That’s over half a chance of getting an F, and it’s extremely skewed. Chapter 12 suggests that a smaller grading scale, such as the 4.0 scale is a better representation of students’ mastery. There is a warning, though, that parents and students might not understand why a 4.0 scale is better. It is too easy to associate each number with a letter grade and parents and students might wonder why a teacher wouldn’t just put down the associated letter grade. But these smaller grading scales are actually more accurate in displaying students’ understanding of the content, are more accurate on a schoolwide basis, and result in less guesswork on the teacher’s part. The confusion of what separates a 94 and a 93.8 are lost, as the grading scale is much smaller and more precise.

There was also focus on differentiation in the gradebook and on report cards. Gradebooks should reflect students understanding of content mastery, not just numbers and checks for completion. If gradebooks are altered to record students’ progress with the content, than teachers will better understand where they need to change units and focus more heavily, so that all students are fully understanding the material.